

An allergen and blocking sorbent for topical application to the skin comprising a surface-modified layered material, such as an intercalated clay, dispersed in a cosmetically acceptable solvent. The organic surface modifier is an organic molecule that contains a substantial dipole moment sufficient to bond, through ion-dipole interactions, with an exchangeable cation on the inner surface of adjacent clay platelets. Suitable organic surface modifiers include aldehydes, ketones, carboxylic acids, alcohols, phenols, ethers, catecols, lactams, lactones and pyrrolidones. The preferred layered material useful in this invention includes the entire family of smectite type clays. The composition is topically applied to the skin to absorb or adsorb (hereinafter "sorb" or "sorbent") via intercalation between spaced layers of the layered material, and block allergenic organic compounds from plants such as poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac, thus preventing skin rashes.